

What do Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty show us about traditional philosophical views of perception?

Within this essay, I will be exploring Merleau-Ponty's response to traditional philosophical views of perception. The traditional philosophical view of perception comes across as rather empirical in its description of what it is to perceive, seeing things as collections of parts that we see with our eyes and interpret in our minds. Merleau-Ponty would disagree with this, as he would say that we do not in fact view things as a collection of parts, but as the whole that is created by these parts.

An example being how easily we are tricked by optical illusions, the checker shadow illusion for instance, in which there is an image of a checkerboard with a cylinder casting a shadow over the center of the board. This causes you to believe that the black coloured checker that is not shadowed is a different colour to the white checker that is within shadow, when they are in fact the same colour. This kind of experiment shows us that we are actually incapable of perceiving an object as just the parts within it, as the shape and colour of them is based on the shape and colour of the surrounding objects as no matter how hard you try, without connecting the two squares together with a line, you cannot tell that they are the same colour.

We also appear to automatically perceive collections of shapes as an object without it even resembling the object closely, such as if you were to put three circles together, you would put that together in your mind to be an image of mickey mouse, despite being just three shapes overlaid, or if you see a picture of a cartoon character with two dots for eyes. These do not resemble eyes on their own, but in the context of the surroundings of the dots, they would occupy the position in relation to the other lines that the eyes should occupy. With this information, it can be argued that we don't actually perceive objects, but instead the idea behind the objects, seeing as dots are just symbols that mean something other than what they portray by themselves.

At this point, you can begin to explore what it really means to perceive in the mind, seeing as not everything you see can be trusted to be real, such as if you were to look in the sky and see a plane, would it matter whether or not it was really there, or instead, does it matter why your brain perceived that stimuli to be a plane in your mind. This could be taken even further if you were to say that everything that you see is just a model of reality created by our minds using what we see with our eyes. Or it could think in a cartesian sense that what we perceive is just created from our mind, and that perception doesn't rely on the sense organs to begin with, as it is just as easy to confuse a dream with reality as it is to have a vivid hallucination, and neither are necessarily products of outside stimuli.

Bibliography

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